

## Behavioural Characteristics of Cattle

- Cattle will not move/remain immobile when first threatened. They will stand still and assess the situation before making a move. If they are frightened, their natural instinct is to escape. If this means running over the top of you, they will.
- Cattle try to keep all other animals within their eye line. They have a field view of 330° and have the ability to see threats from almost every direction.
- Social order (who is the boss of who) is usually established at about 2 years of age and is maintained by threats and butting. When mobs are mixed, this social order has to be re-established so aggression will usually occur until this new order has been sorted out. This may slow down the movement of stock, so this needs to be managed effectively.
- Within each mob, there is an order of dominance. This can be seen in action at the water or feed trough where you will be able to see certain animals always eating or drinking first while the others hang back. It can also be seen when the cattle are on the move, as the same animals will always be seen to be leading the mob and will be the first to enter confined spaces, like holding yards. These confined spaces can cause problems to the order of dominance and can cause significant stress on the animals. As a result, some animals will become aggressive to try and maintain their own personal space.
- Social behaviour varies with age, breed, sex etc.
- Young bulls, when moved in groups, show a degree of playfulness (pushing and shoving) but as they get older, they will become more aggressive and territorial. Adult bulls have a large personal space (around 6 meters) and if they feel crowded, say in yards or gateways, they will fight to maintain this space.
- Bulls are uncontrollable when fighting. They will get very agitated and will break away unexpectedly. You will need to be very careful in these moments so as to not get injured.
- Cows with young calves are very protective! Handling the calves in the presence of their mother can be very dangerous.
- Cattle, particularly *Bos indicus* breeds, do not like being singled out in paddocks or yards, and can become extremely agitated/angry.